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SUBJECT: A/S SAUERBREY DISCUSSES POPULATION, SOCIAL ISSUES AND TIP

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#### Summary

1. (SBU) On February 5, Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) Ellen Sauerbrey met separately with the GVN's Commission for Population, Family and Children and the National Assembly's Committee for Social Affairs. Commission Vice-Chairman Nguyen Ba Thuy discussed Vietnam's "two-child policy," affirming the practice of non-coercive methods. The Assistant Secretary raised the issue of sex-selective abortions in Vietnam and discussed the GVN's current solutions for addressing a growing sex ratio imbalance in Vietnam. She also expressed concern over access to education for children in the Central Highlands and discussed the GVN's development of a legal framework for adoptions and foster care.

2. (SBU) Nguyen Thi Hoai Thu, Chair of the Committee for Social Affairs, briefed the Assistant Secretary on Vietnam's latest efforts to fight trafficking in persons (TIP) and domestic violence and build greater gender equality in Vietnam. Thu conceded that the GVN needed to do more on the demand side of the TIP issue, namely by incorporating the prosecution of men who patronize prostitutes into anti-TIP strategies. Thu said Vietnam had faced "difficulties" providing training on domestic violence for police and housing options for abused wives. The Chairwoman pointed to Vietnam's recently passed gender equality law as evidence that the country had moved forward on this issue, but admitted much work remained to be done to change long-held attitudes. End Summary.

Two-Child Policy: Recommendation, not Coercion

3. (SBU) During her meeting with Commission for Population, Family and Children (CPFC) Vice Chairman Nguyen Ba Thuy, Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey, accompanied by the DCM, asked for an

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elaboration of the GVN's two-child policy. The Vice Chairman explained that this policy is not compulsory, as much as it is government advice and recommendation. There is "no coercion" behind the policy; rather, the government "recommends" that all Vietnamese families limit themselves to two children, with the government offering family planning services to those that request it. The GVN relies on voluntary adherence and encourages its practice. GVN-sponsored programs today offer a wide range of contraceptive options, family planning services and general health and gynecological screenings. The GVN's "two-child recommendation" and "its voluntary adherence" are especially encouraged in rural areas, the Vice Chairman explained.

Party Members that Violate Policy Risk "Bad Standing"

¶4. (SBU) Adherence to the two-child policy is "very much expected" of Communist Party members, as Party members accept Party discipline upon entry and should "set a good example for others," the Vice Chairman continued. Party members that exceed two children are not levied fines, but rather are "placed in bad standing." (Note: Post has heard, anecdotally, of instances of denial of promotions, for those in the public sector, which effectively act as financial penalties. End note.) Additionally, Party members who do not want to abide by Party rules can leave the Party. Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey commended Vietnam for using education rather than "coercion" and allowing families to plan their families "normally."

#### Total Fertility Rate has Dropped Significantly

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¶5. (SBU) In 1975, Vietnam's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) was 5.3 children per woman, whereas, recent 2006 statistics now document the TFR at 2.09, or approximately at population replacement level Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey observed. The average age of marriage in Vietnam is approximately 24 years for a woman and 26 for a man.

#### No Discrimination Against Ethnic Communities

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¶6. (SBU) In terms of ethnic minority communities, the Vice Chairman stated adamantly that their policies do not discriminate against ethnic minorities nor attempt to limit the population growth of ethnic minorities, despite their strong tendency to want larger families. Ethnic minorities have different pressures, including the need for manual labor to tend farms. "For smaller ethnic minority groups, we do not force them to have fewer children, and for larger ethnic minority groups, our focus is on good healthcare rather than family planning," the Vice Chairman said.

¶7. (SBU) The CPFC representatives admitted that getting many of these communities to accept GVN-provided family planning services is "often difficult." For example, most ethnic minority women will not use IUD contraceptives; however, they will use birth control pills or injectable options. The GVN tries to find the best and most

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appropriate services to assist these communities in planning and supporting their families, they explained.

#### Sex Selective Abortion Against the Law, but Still Occurs

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¶8. (SBU) Turning to abortion in Vietnam, the CPFC officials made clear that the GVN has "never considered" abortion as a form of family planning. Vice-Chairman Thuy said that there are many reasons for abortions in Vietnam, including the failure of family planning. In addition, Vietnam is a "Confucian" culture and, as such, abortion is "psychologically difficult" for many Vietnamese women. Sex-selective abortion is against the law in Vietnam as are "all methods of sex selection." Nevertheless, many Vietnamese use "natural ways" of selecting sex, the Vice Chairman said.

¶9. (SBU) "Some" sex-selective abortions are taking place in Vietnam, especially in the countryside, but the CPFC does not have a handle on the extent, the officials said. The Commission will complete a nationwide survey later this year on this practice, and it is working with the World Bank on instituting a relevant monitoring system.

#### "We Won't Make the Same Mistake as China"

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¶10. (SBU) In terms of sex ratios, the CPFC officials admitted that Vietnam's sex ratio imbalance has recently increased to a "high-normal" level of 107 boys to 100 girls, based on the "normal range" of 102-107 reportedly used by the World Bank. The GVN noted that China's sex ratios are "very distorted" as a result of a lack of planning and late solutions. China "made a mistake" by not taking action when their ratio "hit 109," but the GVN would not make the same "mistake." The GVN is currently working with the

governments of China and India on this issue, including holding joint conferences and establishing international working groups, the Vice Chairman said.

#### Ethnic Minority Education in the Central Highlands

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¶11. (SBU) Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey expressed concern about the many young children she saw out of school during her February 1-2 visit to the Central Highlands. The Commission officials responded that primary education, starting at age six, was "universalized" in Vietnam in 2005. However, ethnic minority communities face unique challenges such as mountainous geography and lack of transportation, which can hinder children in those communities attending school. Secondary school books and materials also cost money. The GVN takes these problems seriously, and it has established and funded a special program to facilitate the construction of schools and the provision of transportation in the Central Highlands. This GVN program has only recently swung into high gear, the CPFC officials explained.

#### Adoptions and Foster Care

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¶12. (SBU) The GVN has a legal framework for adoptions and regulatory agreements are in place with many third countries, the Vice Chairman continued. The GVN does not have a legal framework for foster care, although it would like to develop one. Native adoptions are given first priority, and foreign adoptions have secondary priority. In the case of orphans, the CPFC officials explained that, in Vietnamese culture, orphans are typically raised by relatives and GVN-provided financial assistance is made available. The GVN will find foster families if relatives are not available or capable. Assistant Secretary Sauerbrey noted that perhaps the GVN could learn from the experience and laws of the USG and individual states as it develops a legal framework for foster care in Vietnam -- a comment warmly received by the CPFC officials present.

#### GVN National Assembly Faces Challenges with TIP

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¶13. (SBU) Separately on February 5, Nguyen Thi Hoai Thu, Chair of the National Assembly's Committee for Social Affairs, briefed the Assistant Secretary on Vietnam's efforts to combat TIP and domestic violence and build greater gender equality. Thu said that Vietnam had traditionally fought TIP, a "big problem" here, by sharing experiences with other governments and improving educational and employment opportunities for women who are vulnerable to trafficking. She pointed to Vietnam's 2003 Ordinance on the Prevention of Prostitution (Vietnam does not have a trafficking in persons law) as proof positive that the GVN has taken strides to address the TIP problem.

¶14. (SBU) Thu conceded, however, that the GVN has not done enough on the demand side of the TIP problem, namely prosecuting men who

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patronize prostitutes. "We need to include prosecuting men who visit prostitutes into our thinking on combating trafficking," she stated. Thu reacted positively to A/S Sauerbrey's suggestion that Vietnam examine Sweden's laws (that address the demand side of the prostitution problem) and an explanation of U.S. efforts to prosecute those involved in TIP and aid TIP victims. The GVN needs to further study U.S. efforts against TIP, Thu added.

¶15. (SBU) A/S Sauerbrey conveyed her gratitude to the GVN for letting her delegation visit the Central Highlands and appealed for Hanoi to allow even greater access to the area so that the "we can get the full picture of the issues people are facing there." The Assistant Secretary said the GVN needs to do more to meet basic educational needs in the Central Highlands. The GVN realizes that poverty is linked to the TIP problem, has made nine years of schooling compulsory and provides free education and housing for ethnic minority children in the Central Highlands, Thu responded.

#### Combating Domestic Violence

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¶16. (SBU) Thu said men traditionally have had more rights than women in domestic violence situations because Vietnamese have viewed the former as "more important." However, the draft law on domestic violence, drafted by Thu's committee, gives female spouses (as well as children and grandchildren) a means by which to seek redress and enshrines certain basic rights. Thu admitted, though, that Vietnam has faced "difficulty" providing housing options for abused wives. "When a husband is abusive, it is the wife who has to leave the home. It should be the other way around," Thu stated.

¶17. (SBU) Thu said her committee should study the U.S. system of shelters for abused women, as well as training on how to deal with domestic violence for law enforcement. Currently, it is "impossible" for Vietnamese police to get involved when reports of domestic violence surface, Thu stated.

#### Building Gender Equality

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¶18. (SBU) Thu said the recently passed law on gender equality, authored by the Women's Union and reviewed by the Committee on Social Affairs, "equalizes women with men." The law enshrines basic rights for women in the areas of health care, employment and education. A/S Sauerbrey commended Vietnam for the passage of this law.

¶19. (U) A/S Sauerbrey has cleared this message.

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